

MAXIM GORKY



# THE LITTLE SPARROW

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# THE LITTLE SPARROW

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Sparrows are just like people. The grown-ups are dull as ditchwater and everything they say sounds as if it came out of a book, but the young ones have minds of their own.

Once upon a time there lived a baby sparrow and his name was Poodik. He lived on top of a bath-house window, just behind the surround, in a nice warm nest made of tow, bits of moss and other soft stuff. He had not yet tried to fly, but already he was flapping his little wings and poking his head out of the nest. He was very impatient to know what the outside world was like and whether it was good enough for him.

"Tweet, tweet – what are you up to?" Mother Sparrow would ask him, and Poodik would shake his wings and, peeping down at the ground, would chirrup back:

"It's ch-err-ibly dark down there! Ch-err-ibly dark!"

Then Father Sparrow would come home with some insects for them to eat and start boasting.

"I'm the chief! I'm the chief!"

And Mother Sparrow would chirrup approvingly: "Yes, chief! Yes, chief!"

But Poodik just swallowed the insects and thought to himself: "They give you a worm with legs on it and talk as if it was a miracle!"

And he would keep putting his head out of the nest and looking round.

"Now, child! Now, child!" his mother chirruped at him. "Mind you don't fall out!"





“Chuck it! How could I?” Poodik chirruped back.

“It’ll be chuck you, if there’s a cat about! He’ll gobble you up!” his father explained as he set off on another hunt.

And so the days went by, but Poodik’s wings were in no hurry to grow. One day a strong wind sprang up.



"Twee-ee-eet! Twee-ee-eet! What's this?" Poodik wanted to know.

"It's the wind," his mother told him. "And it may blow you out of the nest. Then – whoops! Down you go to the cat!"

Poodik didn't like the sound of that, so he said:

"Why are the trees swaying like this? Let them stop swaying, then there won't be any wind."





His mother tried to explain to him that this was not how things worked, but he would not believe her. He had his own explanation for everything.

A man walked past the bath-house, swinging his arms.

"His wings must have been twisted off by a cat," Poodik tweeted.  
"Only the bones are left."

"He's a man. They don't have wings!" his mother said.

"Why not?"







“That’s their job – living without wings. All they can do is hop about on their two legs, see?”

“But why?”

“Because if they had wings, they would come after us, just as Daddy and I do, after the insects.”

“That’s twash!” Poodik tweeted. “Twash and twaddle! Everyone ought to have wings. It can’t be so good on the ground as it is in the air! When I grow up, I’ll see that everyone can fly.”

So Poodik refused to trust his mother. He was still too young to know that if you don’t trust your mother things will turn out badly.

So he perched on the very edge of the nest, chirping out a song he had made up himself.

*Wingless human beings all,  
Your legs are useless things!  
You may be big, you may be tall  
But you each insect bites and stings.  
Now look at me, small as can be,  
I feed on insects, as you see.*



And he went on singing till he fell out of the nest. Down went Mother Sparrow after him, and the cat – a big ginger one with green eyes – there he was!

Poodik was frightened out of his feathers. He spread his little wings and, trembling on his small grey legs, twittered timidly:

“Highly honoured to see you, I’m sure.”



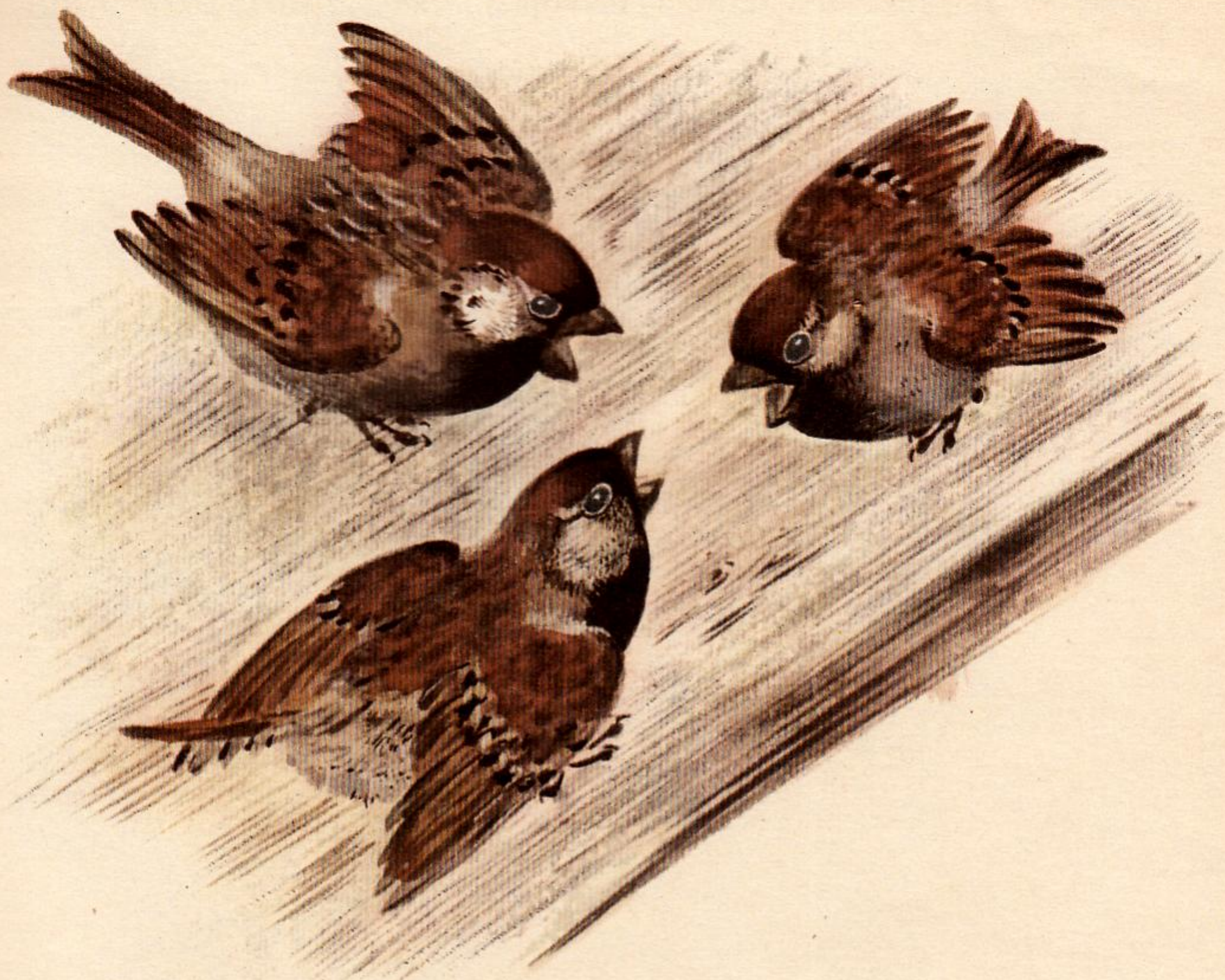


But his mother pushed him aside and with all her feathers ruffled up looked very brave and terrible, her open beak aimed straight at the cat's eye.

"Off you go!" she cried. "Up on the window, Poodik! Fly!..."





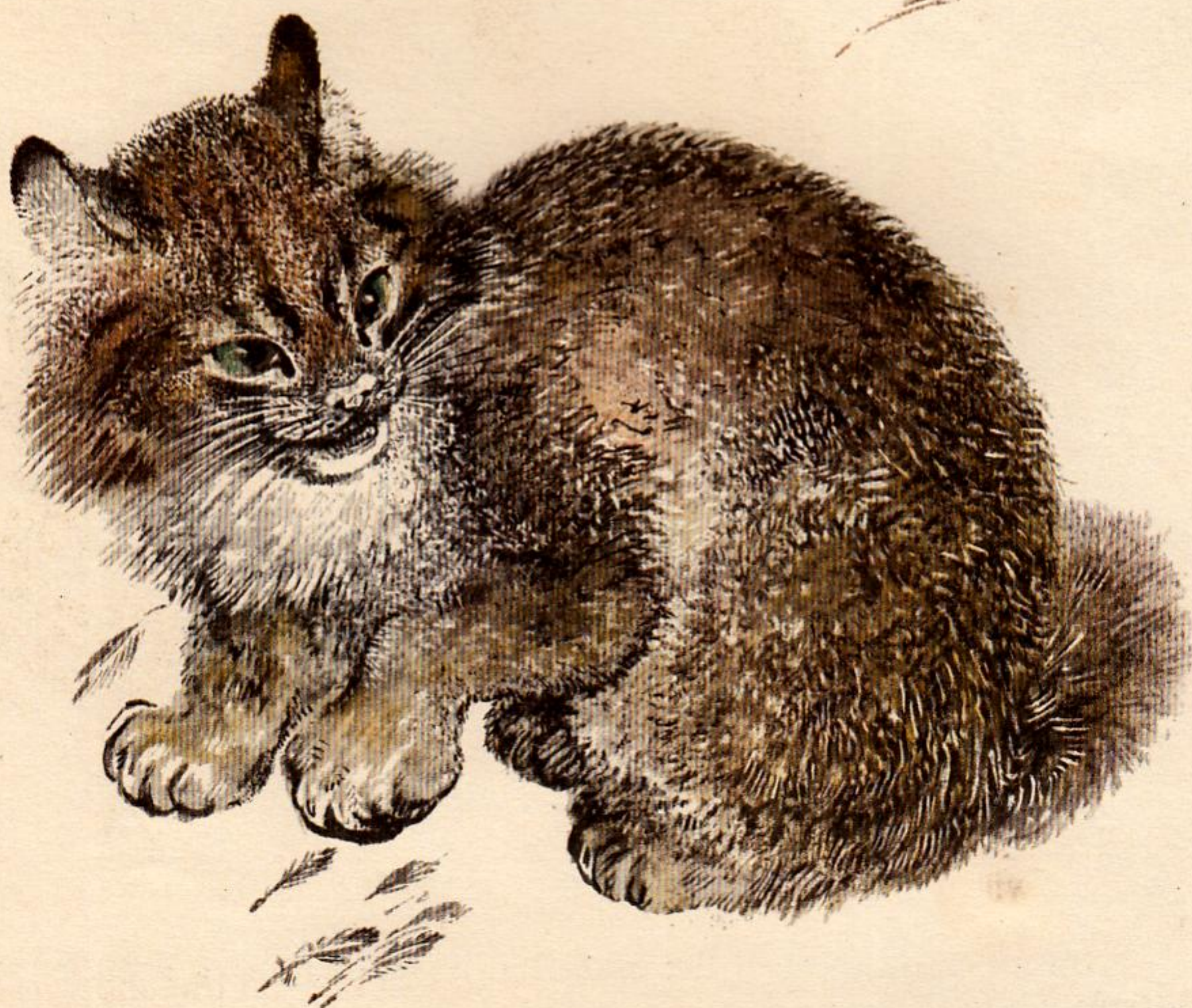


Fear lifted the little sparrow off the ground. He took one jump, flapped his wings once and then again, and there he was on the window ledge.

And after him came Mother. She had lost her tail but she was full of joy. She gave him a good peck on the back of the head and said: "Well?"



“Well what?” said Poodik. “You can’t learn everything at once!”  
And the cat sat on the ground, picking Mother Sparrow’s feathers off  
his paw, looked up at them and miaowed with regret:  
“Miaow! What a sweet little spar-r-riow! Just like a miaowse! Miaow!”







So it all came right in the end, that is, if we don't count the loss of Mummy's tail.







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